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ABSTRACT

This study examines the types of programs provided by higher education institutions for student-athletes and assesses how well particular services contribute to students' academic and personal success. A survey instrument designed to measure perceptions and opinions about the variety and development of academic support services for student-athletes was completed by athletic directors and senior student affairs officers (n=212) at member institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I-A football colleges during the 1995-96 academic year. The 21-item survey contained three demographic questions; the remaining 18 questions covered personal services, professional/career services, and academic services. The study found that athletic department personnel considered tutorial services, academic advising, and teaching of study skills the most important academic services; the same three services were also rated highly by student affairs personnel. Both athletic department and student affairs respondents rated least important support services such as planning for retirement from athletics, managing personal finances, and encouraging involvement in campus activities outside athletics. More than 80 percent of institutions reported providing services such as time management training, study skills programs, personal counseling, orientation and transfer help, study assistance centers, additional academic advising, and tutorial programs. A table summarizes ratings. (Contains 15 references.) (CH)

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Support Services for Student-Athletes:

Athletic Department and Student Affairs Officers

Perceptions

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Support Services for Student-Athletes: Athletic Department and Student Affairs Officers Perceptions

Abstract

College athletic programs can play an important developmental process for student-athletes, but as is more often the case, these programs serve to segregate this population from the campus community. With a variety of special needs and strong institutional expectations, student-athletes are expected to perform well for their institution and maintain academic integrity. The current study examines what institutions provide for student-athletes, and identifies how particular services contribute to their academic and personal success. Using a national sample of student affairs and intercollegiate athletic professionals, survey results indicated a great deal of importance placed on academic services first and personal services second.

Student-athletes represent a very unique population in higher education institutions whose needs have frequently been overlooked (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Subsequently, there is a strong need to examine and explore services provided in higher education to help student-athletes cope and succeed both on campus in their future lives and careers.

The opinion that student-athletes are "athletes" first and "students" second has been voiced by few athletic coaches, yet the sentiment is prevalent in big-time college sports, particularly those which produce significant levels of revenue (Gerdy, 1987; Michener, 1976; Sperber, 1990). Although stereotypes have been sometimes greatly overstated (Ryan, 1989) there is a serious need for quality student-athlete support services which account for all areas of student development. It is important, then, that program providers realize these areas of student development and the special commitment to this group of students (Gurney & Stuart, 1987).

Previous studies have reported conflicting and confusing results regarding the participation of students

in collegiate athletics. Positive findings, such as Astin's (1984) report of no differences between athletes and non-athletes in mature relationships with the opposite sex and in independence. Contrasting results have been presented by Blann (1985) who concluded that athletic participation was detrimental to career and educational planning, and Landers (1978), who reported that athletes do not tend to develop the intellectual self concepts and academic skills needed to succeed in college. In light of this research, it is surprising that no research body addressed the views of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) and Athletic Directors (AD) regarding the development of programs to aid student-athletes.

Context of College Athletes

The special population of student-athletes is confronted with the duality of being students as well as athletes. This means they have to meet the developmental challenges faced by regular students including, but not limited to, developing and strengthening academic, social, intra-personal competencies; establishing identification

outside of their families and communities; creating and maintaining interpersonal and intimate relationships; developing a personal belief system; and formulating career goals (Parham, 1993). Additionally, specialized challenges of student-athletes include balancing academics and athletics, adapting to being isolated from social and core "mainstream" activities, managing success and failure, optimizing physical health to minimize injury, maintaining multiple relationships with parents, coaches, friends, and community, and learning to cope with the termination of an athletic career (Parham, 1993).

Due to the realization of the complexity of needs of this population, administrators have developed special advising programs as they do for high-risk students, honor students, and returning adult students (Grites, 1982). Some of the special areas of needed counseling identified by Lanning (1982) included unique peer group problems, time management and study skill problems, and self-concept problems. Weston (1984) expanded these special concerns to include scholastic disabilities, personal development, personal adjustments, pain, and lack of motivation. Blann

(1985) and Sowa and Gressard (1983) have expressed concern for the lack of maturity of student-athletes regarding formulating well-defined educational and career goals.

The most obvious areas of challenge in regards to student-athlete services have been identified as academic issues, dealing with athletic success or failure, social and leisure experiences, and health oriented issues (Parham, 1993). The first challenge, academics, was the most demanding for the developers of student-athlete support services as they work with students who sometimes were not adequately prepared, who were not likely to graduate and who did not focus on academics in establishing priorities (Whitener & Myers, 1986).

Research Methods

Participants

The population of the study consisted of all Athletic Directors and Senior Student Affairs Officers in the United States who were representatives of institutions which were members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A for football during the 1995-1996

academic year. These institutions offered the comprehensive and competitive intercollegiate athletic programs where services would be most likely to be found for student-athletes. During the academic year of study, 106 institutions met the criteria for inclusion, providing a set of 212 subjects for including in the study.

Instrument

The survey instrument used for conducting the research was designed to measure perceptions and opinions about the variety and development of academic support services for student-athletes. The researcher-designed survey was created as an outgrowth of a review of pertinent literature in the field of student-athlete development. The 21-item survey contained three demographic questions and 18 questions on student-athlete services divided into three areas: personal services, professional/career services, and academic services. For these 18 items, respondents were the first indicate whether the services were offered for athletes at their institutions. Then they were asked to rate their perceived importance of each item on a 1-to-5

scale, ranging from "Not Important" to "Very Important," respectively.

Findings

Of the 212 identified study participants, 106 were classified as athletic department personnel and 106 were classified as senior student affairs administrators. A total of 138 usable surveys (64% response rate) from the two groups ultimately completed and returned the survey questionnaires, including 70 athletic department representatives and 68 student affairs representatives.

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate their perceived importance of selected services for student-athletes. This section, divided into the categories of personal, professional/career, and academic services, included 18 services. Athletic department personnel responded that they perceived the following to be the most important academic services: tutorial services (mean 4.87), providing academic advising (mean 4.81), and teaching study skills (mean 4.78; see Table 1). These same three services were also rated by the

participating student affairs personnel, with mean scores of 4.81, 4178, and 4.66, respectively.

Athletic department respondents perceived the least important support services for student athletes were planning retirement from athletics (mean 3.53 in Table 1), managing personal finances (mean 3.88), and encouraging campus involvement beyond athletics (mean 4.25). Again, student affairs respondents rated the same three services as the least important, with mean scores of 3.16, 3.83, and 4.12, respectively.

Based on the identification of athletic department or student affairs personnel, questionnaire items four through 21 were compared to determine whether their perceptions differed on the support services. Using an Analysis of Variance procedure, no significant differences were identified.

In terms of the provision of support services, 83% reported that they provided teaching time management skills at their institutions. Also offered were study skills (at 84% of the responding institutions), personal counseling (87%), orientation and transfer help (94%), study

assistance centers (94%), academic advising in addition to that offered by academic departments (94%), and tutorial programs (95%; see Table 1).

Discussion

College athletic programs have the potential to provide tremendous revenue and publicity for an institution, yet there are serious ethical considerations that must be placed on the parameters of using student-athletes for institutional benefit. One of the most important aspects of this ethical discussion is the role of providing support for student-athletes and the extent to which the offices of intercollegiate athletics and student affairs offer programs and services to ensure student success. Central to this discussion is: what do those in decision-making positions believe about the importance of specific population support services, and what do they insist on offering?

Findings revealed the general perception that student support services are important and are generally provided to student-athletes. Perhaps more importantly, the

consistency in agreement between athletic directors and student affairs professionals indicates a commonly agreed to sense of importance for aiding student-athletes. This support can take the form of general life-skills, such as time management, but is particularly acute in dealing with the academic dimensions of college life, such as academic advising, study skills, tutoring to succeed in the classroom, and organized study assistance centers.

A particular challenge to student affairs professionals is how to determine if these services are fulfilling the student-athlete needs, and if not, what can be done to improve or expand services. Of all 3,700 colleges and universities in the United States, only approximately 100 have what are considered major college sports programs. A vast majority of student affairs professionals must learn to deal directly with student-athletes who may have special needs.

These needs may be readily identified, as is often the case when large intercollegiate athletics departments can provide the human and financial resources to inventory these needs, but more than likely, the special needs of

these students must be the responsibility of divisions of student affairs. What special programs are offered for student-athletes during orientation? What programs are offered for career planning and placement? How can student-athletes learn the aggressiveness necessary for success in competition for their institution, but control this aggression in the classroom and on campus? Only when institutional responsibility is taken for this population of students can the ethical concerns so evident today be addressed in a meaningful fashion.

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Table 1.
Student-Athlete Services by Rating, Respondent Group, and Comparison

Service	Athl Dept Import. (SD)	Stud Aff Import. (SD)	% Offered
Personal Service			
Teaching time management.	4.76 (.57)	4.63 (.57)	83%
Teaching social coping skills.	4.32 (.68)	4.32 (.08)	62
Providing personal Counseling.	4.35 (.80)	4.31 (.80)	87
Promoting health awareness.	4.25 (.74)	4.25 (.74)	75
Teaching stress management.	4.29 (.77)	4.16 (.77)	60
Encouraging campus involvement beyond athletics.	4.25 (.82)	4.12 (.82)	68
Professional/Career Services			
Providing career planning.	4.50 (.81)	4.40 (.81)	75
Planning retirement from athletics.	3.53 (1.14)	3.16 (1.13)	38
Managing personal finances.	3.88 (.80)	3.83 (.80)	42

Table 1, continued
Student-Athlete Services by Rating, Respondent Group, and Comparison

Service	Athl Dept Import. (SD)	Stud Aff Import. (SD)	% Offered
Promoting academic/ professional involvement.	4.29 (.95)	4.19 (.95)	60
Providing career placement activity.	4.49 (.88)	4.37 (.88)	80
Providing professional and personal life counseling.	4.30 (.614)	4.34 (.61)	81
Academic Services			
Providing orientation/ transfer activity.	4.65 (.55)	4.62 (.55)	94
Providing study assistance halls/ centers.	4.72 (.64)	4.63 (.64)	94
Providing tutorial programs.	4.87 (.43)	4.81 (.43)	95
Providing academic advising.	4.81 (.48)	4.78 (.48)	94
Teaching study skills.	4.78 (.59)	4.66 (.59)	84
Providing basic skill enhancement.	4.34 (.89)	4.34 (.12)	72